

September 9, 2014

To: Public Lands Interim Committee Hearing

From: Bonnie Schonefeld
Alan Schonefeld

PUBLIC LANDS TESTIMONY

Unlike the majority of Americans, who are co-owners of our commons, Idahoans have the incredible privilege of living next to vast expanses of public lands. It is not by accident that we live here. Forty years ago we made a conscious decision to move to Idaho County based on its proximity to public lands, roadless and primitive areas.

Now the state of Idaho is considering taking this land away from the rest of Americans, people who don't get to live here, but who still own the land and who pay taxes to help finance the care and infrastructure on that land. It belongs to all of us, all 300-million plus American citizens. It belongs to our nephews who moved to Idaho after they joined us for their first backpacking trip. It belongs to cousins who live from coast to coast across the country, to my sister and nephews in Colorado, to my mother and son in California and, most important, our grandchildren and great nieces and nephews who will one day be the next generation to use, visit and be renewed by this land.

While wilderness provides the incubator for wildlife, fisheries, clean water and clean air, it is the front country that reaps the benefits. This is where most people camp, fish, hunt, picnic, pick berries and take pictures. It's where we take our young grandkids, still too young for extended backcountry trips, to experience nature.

This is the land the legislature wants to take away from all of us. This is the land, based on a "back of a napkin" financial analysis, they somehow think will rake in millions of dollars for the state. And if the cost of fighting fires, campground maintenance, road and trail repair, etc. (costs currently born by all of us) on this land exceeds the benefits, the legislature has a plan: just sell the land so only the highest bidder will have access to our birthright. This "takings" of land from its current owners has extreme consequences for all of us: we have NEVER been "locked out" of any public land, only from private land.

Bottom line: this proposal is a very bad idea and we are tired of our taxpayer dollars being used to finance ill-conceived jousts at windmills.

Sincerely,

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